

by The Honorable Robert F. Hale

Integrity first...Service before self...Excellence in all we do. Provide resource management and financial services to defend the United States through the control and exploitation of air and space. These values and mission were established for the Air Force financial management community during our long range planning effort completed in 1996. Recently we published an updated document, the United States Air Force Financial Management Mid-Range Plan 98. A copy should be available to you in your office or it may be found on the FM Home Page (<http://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/SAFFM/>). Please take a moment to look at this plan.

This Mid-Range Plan specifies five core competencies for Air Force financial management that must be accomplished if the Air Force is to carry out its mission effectively. Because they are critical to the Air Force mission, these core competencies underscore why we will always play an important role in the Air Force. The Mid-Range Plan also outlines six goals and associated objectives that provide a roadmap for achieving our core competencies efficiently and effectively.

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Our Core Competencies

Our first core competency, and a key one, commits us to exercise fiduciary responsibility. In other words, we are responsible for being sure that financial laws and regulations are obeyed, something the Air Force must do if it is to be a good steward of the public's funds. We also must ensure internal controls are in place to protect Government resources. The responsibility to apply financial policies requires financial managers to be held to the highest standards of professional excellence.

We also formulate, justify, and execute budgets. Only funds duly authorized and appropriated may be expended for the mission of the Air Force. We in the financial management community must budget for the financial needs of the Air Force, explain and support those needs, and ensure the funds finally appropriated are executed effectively to satisfy mission requirements. Although commanders and managers throughout the Air Force have key roles in the budget process, the responsibility for making the process work ultimately rests with us.

Another of our core competencies is to provide financial services. When Air Force personnel are concerned about their pay or travel reimbursement, they cannot concentrate effectively on getting the job done. We must ensure smooth delivery of the pay and travel service for our people and the payments due our suppliers. A stable and reassuring financial situation allows Air Force personnel to perform their mission without distractions. The timely payment of Air Force vendors helps ensure a solid and continuing business relationship.

We are committed to provide financial advice and analyses that commanders and managers need to make good financial decisions. The Air Force is entrusted with the prudent management of taxpayer dollars. This public trust must be upheld with the highest possible level of analytical support. Data without analysis provides little help to commanders charged with leading a deployed force, managing an installation, or procuring a future weapon system for the Air Force. It is a fundamental task of the Air Force financial management community to provide decision makers with expert business, economic, and financial advice.

Finally, we support contingency operations. Our wartime taskings often have us deploying in the first wave and is the key reason why the Air Force will always need a substantial number of blue-suit personnel in its financial management community. When the Air Force deploys, whether deploying to a bare-base environment or

Financial Management Core Competencies

Exercise fiduciary responsibility
Formulate, justify, and execute budgets
Provide financial services
Provide financial advice and analyses
Support contingency operations

to a fully supported installation, we must provide the financial services necessary to support our deployed forces. These functions include pay, travel, accounting, disbursing, budgeting, financial analysis and other support as required.

Six Goals That Help Achieve Our Core Competencies

To support these core competencies our Mid-Range Plan specifies six goals with associated objectives. As we review these goals, please see where you both support and gain from the objectives of each.

Learning is a lifelong pursuit. So we must always excel through training, education, and career guidance. Continuous education ensures that financial managers remain current and qualified to succeed in the fast changing world of Federal financial management. But learning does not have to be in the classroom. We are turning increasingly to CD-ROMs and web-based training. Nor does learning have to come from courses. We are implementing a voluntary mentoring program for FM personnel so they can learn from more senior individuals.

To remain effective we must organize effectively. We have developed a standard FM organization at base-level to facilitate communication, training, and the establishment of common procedures. We are asking major commands to implement this organization by the end of 1998. We have also established an Air Force focal point for accounting and finance activities under a Secretariat-level office reporting directly to SAF/FM. This new Air Force Accounting and Finance Office (AFAFO) is located at the DFAS-Denver Center.

We have and will continue to make substantial progress in improving business practices. We are currently deploying the ABSS computer system to automate the handling of contract-type documents. We plan to continue deploying the new travel system and we hope to begin deploying the new FIRST budget system next year. We are also assisting the Air Force in streamlining its purchasing practices through greater use of the IMPAC card. In addition, we are aggressively working to improve the quality of our financial systems and data so that we can obtain a "clean" or unqualified audit opinion on our financial statements.

Whether the information relates to budgets, economic analyses, or costs, commanders and managers need accurate financial information to reduce costs and improve efficiency. We can help by emphasizing analytical decision making. We will continue to provide careful and effective review of economic analyses and A-76 studies and coordinate Air Force implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Additionally, we act as the Air Force center of excellence in support of activity-based costing (ABC). SAF/FMC has taught many of you ABC and will continue to provide this service and support as required.

We need to ensure an adequate number of Air Force personnel are well trained and available to support contingency operations and wartime needs. To do this we will continue to improve the highly successfully TOP DOLLAR program which provides excellent training opportunities in contingency operations for both finance and contracting personnel. Additionally, we will continue to enhance the flow of real-time financial information to and from the battlefield by improving deployable systems and reducing our personnel and logistics footprint. We will also fully integrate financial management personnel from the Air Reserve Component into contingency operations.

Finally, we must work continuously to improve communications. We have a number of avenues for communicating—The Air Force Comptroller magazine, newsletters, and internet home pages at SAF/FM and levels below. These vehicles provide Air Force personnel a means to become aware of key issues affecting the financial management community. I encourage you to keep informed on the current financial management issues by reading this periodical, our home page, and other sources. You can also help by writing an article for your command newsletter or this magazine about a project at your base.

Working Our Plan

The six goals and associated objectives in the plan provide a roadmap for achieving our core competencies effectively and efficiently. While it is important to write down our goals and objectives, it is even more important to work to meet them. Currently, we are actively engaged in pursuing these objectives, and I ask your help wherever appropriate. We must plan our work, but we must also work our plan.

If you have comments or thoughts about this plan, I would be glad to hear from you (haler@af.pentagon.mil). I am committed to maintaining a strong Air Force FM community that can continue to provide the highest level of support to the Air Force. This Mid-Range Plan is an important part of that effort.

Our Goals

- Excel through training, education, and career guidance
- Organize effectively
- Improve business practices
- Emphasize analytical decision-making
- Support contingency operations
- Improve communications